

## **“Shared Truth from the Youth” Art Exhibit**

### **Artist Statement**

Discovering and becoming comfortable with one’s identity is arguably our most arduous undertaking as human beings. In a world that is obsessed with categorization, becoming content with our individual abnormalities can be exceedingly difficult. This process is further compounded by the pressures and barriers that are placed upon the youth in our society. While we all enter this world as creatively compassionate and empathetic beings, the current structure of our systems often impedes the ability to exist as our natural selves.

In most instances, the voices of youth are stifled and assumed to be less legitimate in the scope of those existing in certain hierarchies of society. Despite these assumptions, many youth are able to create and exist in a manner that enhances their ability to share and express themselves. As a result, these youth test their bounds in ways that forces them to express their perspectives with transparency - particularly when addressing some of our time’s most pressing issues. The combination of their work within this installation addresses some of the shortcomings of our society in multiple ways.

Public art serves as a platform that challenges the way people think, which in itself, is a political act. Youth are gatekeepers to innovation, activism, and progression for the future - and yet, their voices are often treated with inadequacy. In regards to culture, intimacy, and creativity many of these youths’ foci are rooted in hope, freedom and justice. Inspiration is still found at every turn in New Orleans, from the rich culture and history, onto the food and diverse music. And the colors and eyes within these pieces reflect the inner child, with the color blue being an effective medium in eloquently expressing personal experiences, representing an all-inclusive spectrum of emotions.

The work included within this installation reflects the diverse cultures and perspectives of the youth involved in its conception. In these existent control systems, there is a fear instilled in the youth of failing to reach expectations established by society - and that fear of failure extends to the layers of oppression that are experienced from such meticulous monitoring in order to successfully reach those expectations. This installation is an illustration of the triumph that can be manifested when youth have the ability to create and collaborate with fearless and boundless creativity.



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## **About the Project**

In 2017, the Arts Council New Orleans, the Young Artist Movement (YAM), and their partner organizations were selected as the winners of the City’s Digital Equity Challenge. The Creative Digital Equity Initiative leverages the power of public art as a high-interest entry point into digital literacy; social, emotional, and professional skill building; and job preparedness for youth. Lead artist Jessica Strahan, along with 15 youth, conceptualized this temporary art installation. It will begin at City Hall and travel to other locations across the city. Throughout the process, youth learned digital skills that are critical to the public art and design process, including: writing professional e-mails and managing a calendar, conducting online research, collaborating on shared google documents, graphic design in Photoshop, and social media marketing. The art installation's design was informed by an extensive research and engagement process involving 120 community members.

## **About the Artists**

Jessica Strahan is a native of New Orleans who is inspired by the vibrancy of the Crescent City as well as the African diaspora. Her artwork consistently depicts the city’s rich culture, distinctive landmarks, and colorful people juxtaposed with tribes of the motherland. With works already on the walls of homes in London, England New York City and Athens, Greece, Strahan is set on sharing her art throughout the world. Recent group exhibitions include Face to Face at LeMieux Galleries (NOLA), Mirrored Migrations at Rush Corridor Gallery (NYC), and Soul II Soul at Old No. 77 Hotel & Chandlery (NOLA). She is a regional winner of the 2016 Bombay Sapphire Artisan series and displayed during Art Basel | Miami Beach.

16 talented New Orleans youth contributed to the design and creation of the artwork:

Roy Barree	Nathalie Figueroa	Skye McQuirter	Gerrick Walker
Shanti Broom	Gabrielle Johnson	Raven Sandoval	Annise Watson
Calvin Brown	La’Doya Macklin	Kiyah Simmons	Mariah Williams
Kasey Hunter	Kate Madura	Taneil Vickers	Sly Watts

Thank you to project staff Aubrey Edwards, Nic Aziz, Almas Haider, and Atianna Cordova for their leadership and guidance of young people in the process of designing, creating, and writing about their artwork.

